

# Threatened and Endangered Species in Forests of Wisconsin

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# FROSTED ELFIN BUTTERFLY

(*Incisalia irus*)

Federal Status: Not Listed  
State Status: Threatened

## Description:

The frosted elfin is a small gray-brown butterfly,  $\frac{7}{8}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches from forewing tip to forewing tip.



The underside of the hindwing is primarily brown with light gray “frosting” on the outer portion. The wing is somewhat hooked on the bottom edge and includes a stubby tail with a black spot near its base. The underside of the forewing has a crooked white line.

**Habitat:** In Wisconsin, the frosted elfin inhabits oak/pine forest openings, edges, jack pine barrens and oak scrub areas. The larval (caterpillar) food plant, wild lupine (*Lupinus perennis*), grows where there is a partial canopy cover. The Karner blue butterfly and phlox flower moth may also be observed on these sites. The frosted elfin adult

lays its greenish-white or bluish-white eggs on lupine in mid May to early June, just before the peak of blooming. It spends the late spring and early summer as larvae on these same lupine plants. The frosted elfin overwinter as pupae in the surface leaf litter, or possibly underground.

**Forestry Considerations:** Limited timber harvest is compatible with, and perhaps even beneficial to, frosted elfin populations. Frosted elfin have been observed where there is moderate (not intensive) timber management and along timber lanes in oak barrens. Few frosted elfin have been found on a site within ten years of a burn. If fires are used to maintain openings in a wooded landscape, they should be applied on a rotational basis and always before May. Mowing after mid-summer (every year or every other year) and localized cutting and herbiciding of brush favor the frosted elfin and its habitat. Spraying of Bt for gypsy moth control will kill elfin larvae if the spray campaign is conducted while the elfin is in a susceptible life stage. It is best to avoid spraying sites where the frosted elfin butterfly or phlox flower moth are known to occur, or use gypsy moth-specific toxins.

